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Letter to Oregon Newspaper Describes Slayings of Five Women

PORTLAND, Ore., May 26— An unsigned letter received by The Oregonian, the state's largest newspaper, contains a confession to five murders and includes details of the crimes that have never been made public. In one of the cases, a man and a woman were convicted of murder in 1991 and are serving life sentences.

Written next to a Happy Face at the top of the first page of the letter are the words "All 5 of 5."

"I would like to tell my story!" the letter says. It then goes on to describe five slayings in Oregon and California.

The Oregonian, which has a daily circulation of about 340,000, received the letter three weeks ago and last Sunday began a series of articles about the slayings to which the writer alludes.

The first is that of Taunja Bennett, who the police say was killed on Jan. 21, 1990. Her body was found off the old Columbia Gorge Scenic Highway.

John Sosnovske, 43, and his 62-year-old companion, Laverne Pavlinac, were convicted of murdering Ms. Bennett after Ms. Pavlinac confessed to the crime. Although she immediately withdrew her confession, the judge in her trial allowed it to be introduced into evidence. After she was convicted, Mr. Sosnovske pleaded no contest to the murder charge in exchange for escaping the death penalty.

The second slaying discussed in the letter is that of a woman whose body was found near Blythe, Calif. The letter writer said he took the woman from a rest area, bound her with tape and raped her repeatedly before killing her and dumping her body near a highway seven miles north of Blythe. **Body Bound With Tape**

On Aug. 30, 1992, a woman's body was found near the location described in the letter. A cause of death was never determined and the body remains unidentified.

A Riverside County, Calif., sheriff's deputy, Richard Dollarhide, said the body had in fact been bound with tape, a fact never publicly disclosed.

The letter goes on to discuss the strangulation of a woman whose body was dumped behind a cafe near Turlock, Calif.

Detective James Edmondson of the Merced County, Calif., Sheriff's Office confirmed that a body was found on Aug. 30, 1992, near the cafe described in the letter. The body was so badly decomposed that the cause of death could not be positively determined, although the case was listed as a drug overdose.

The fourth slaying described in the letter involved a woman in Salem, Ore. "I felt so much power," the writer said. "I then told her she was going to die and slowly strangled her and dropped her off behind G.I. Joe's in Salem."

In November 1992, the body of a young woman was found behind a G.I. Joe's, an outdoor supplies retail store, in Salem. An autopsy showed that she had died of strangulation. **Body Near Pile of Rocks**

Finally, the writer described the killing of a woman he said he picked up in Corning, Calif. He said he left her body on or near a pile of rocks 20 miles from Santa Nella.

Detective Michelle Sandri of the Santa Clara, Calif., County Sheriff's Department said there is no way anyone outside her department should have known that the body found there in July 1993 was lying by a pile of rocks.

Multnomah County officials say that Mr. Sosnovske may have shared the details of the slaying of Ms. Bennett in the Columbia Gorge with whomever was responsible for the other four slayings mentioned in the letter.

The authorities are checking on Mr. Sosnovske's former cellmates to see if any of them could have written the letter, which detectives are analyzing for fingerprints.

Mr. Sosnovske's lawyer, William S. Brennan, said he thought his client was not guilty. Ms. Pavlinac's lawyer, Michael Curtis, also says he is convinced of his client's innocence. Since their convictions, Mr. Sosnovske and Ms. Pavlinac have continued to say they are not guilty.

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